

MATRIX FOR CLASSIFYING CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT (CAN) FATALITIES

July 2000

Purpose: Senate Bill 525 (Polanco, Chapter 1012, Statutes of 1999) mandates that the State Department of Health Services (DHS) “design, test and implement a statewide child abuse and neglect fatality tracking system incorporating information collected by local child death review teams (CDRTs)”. In conjunction with the State Child Death Review Council, the EPIC Branch of DHS is undertaking the Fatal Child Abuse and Neglect Surveillance (FCANS) Program as of July 1, 2000.

This Matrix is intended to serve as the statewide framework for defining child abuse and neglect fatalities within the FCANS Program. It is not intended to replace other legal definitions used by law enforcement, medical examiners, or child protective workers in their official duties. Rather, it is proposed as the standard to be used by local CDRTs in reporting to the state under the provisions of this statute.

Guidelines for use: Local CDRTs will use this Matrix and guidelines for reporting case information to the state under the FCANS Program. For each child death reviewed, CDRTs will make an explicit decision/assessment as to which categories apply. All child deaths with any degree of child abuse or neglect involvement as identified on the Matrix will be reported to the state using the standard Data Collection Form.

Principles for use:

1. CDRT decisions should reflect a team assessment, not just one agency’s position (although the team can decide to “concur or defer” to an agency’s judgement, e.g., coroner or law enforcement).
2. Team decisions should be based upon professional judgements, not only emotional reaction.
3. The team assessment should be grounded in existing evidence, not stereotypes or conjectures.
4. The legal and child protective services definitions for child abuse and neglect (which already leave room for professional discretion) should serve as a baseline for the team’s professional judgements (although they need not be used as a strict criterion).
5. The team assessment should still apply whether or not the child actually died (e.g., Would this incident be reportable if the child had not died?).
6. A formal or informal caregiver role needs to be present (e.g., friend left to “watch” child while parent picks up other children from school; estranged intimate partner returns to kill spouse & kids).
7. In some cases it is appropriate to check more than one box (e.g., both abuse and neglect; both history and any other abuse/neglect).

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Child Abuse Deaths

Child Neglect Deaths

<p>No Child Abuse Child abuse NOT known to be involved in child's life</p>	<p>No Child Neglect Child neglect NOT known to be involved in child's life</p>
<p>Child Abuse History Evidence (i.e., un/substantiated reports) of child abuse in child's history that put child at increased risk of injury or illness, but not directly involved in death. Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Child in foster care due to earlier abuse, but dies of unrelated natural cause or unintentional injuries b. Child with prior childhood abuse commits suicide in teen years (no evidence of recent abuse, or caregiver refusal to get treatment) c. Child with abuse history dies during the commission of a crime (no caretaker directly involved) 	<p>Child Neglect History Evidence of child neglect in child's history that put child at increased risk of injury or illness, but not directly involved in death. Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Chronic neglect of child who dies in motor vehicle crash b. Child with prior childhood neglect commits suicide in teen years (no evidence of recent neglect, or caregiver refusal to get treatment) c. History of chronic neglect in runaway teen who overdoses on heroin
<p>Suspicious/Questionable Child Abuse Although there is not enough evidence to make a definitive assessment of abuse, there are unusual, questionable and/or suspicious factors present that strongly suggest child abuse was the cause, or a direct contributing cause, of the child's death. Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Perinatal substance exposure without clear medical link to infant death b. Conflicting or inconsistent accounts of incident and injuries c. Previous unaccounted for child deaths in care of same family member(s) d. Concealment of pregnancy, but unable to determine infant was born alive 	<p>Suspicious/Questionable Child Neglect Although there is not enough evidence to make a definitive assessment of neglect, there are unusual, questionable and/or suspicious factors present that strongly suggest child neglect was the cause, or a direct contributing cause, of the child's death. Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Chronic neglect of a child/toddler who wanders unattended into street and is hit by a passing car b. Positional asphyxiation of infant sleeping in neglectful environment c. Massive infection due to malnutrition and lack of medical treatment
<p>Definite Child Abuse Related Death Based upon evidence, child abuse was present and contributed in a concrete way to the child's death. Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Perinatal substance abuse with clear medical link to infant death b. Child death by m/paternal overlay under the influence of alcohol or other drugs c. Vehicular manslaughter with DUI and unrestrained child 	<p>Definite Child Neglect Related Death Based upon evidence, child neglect was present and contributed in a concrete way to the child's death. Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Toddler left alone in crack house with open poison container as only liquids available b. Child/toddler drowning while caregiver under the influence of alcohol or drugs c. Loaded gun left out accessible to an unsupervised child
<p>Definite Child Abuse as Primary Cause Based upon evidence, child abuse was the direct cause, or was in the direct chain of causes, of the child's death. Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Intimate partner in parenting/caregiver role intentionally kills spouse and children b. Shaken baby/impact syndrome c. Blunt force trauma inflicted by parent or caregiver w/ or w/o history of prior abuse 	<p>Definite Child Neglect as Primary Cause Based upon evidence, child neglect was the direct cause, or was in the direct chain of causes, of the child's death. Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Untreated life threatening illness/infection b. Abandonment of a live newborn with gross negligence of consequences c. Intentional starvation of child to punish